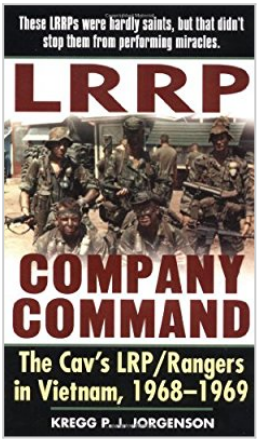

LRRP Company Command: The Cav's LRP/Rangers in Vietnam, 1968-1969

By Kregg P. Jorgenson

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Only the long-range patrols could deliver the critical strategic intelligence that the 1st Cav so desperately needed. Outmanned, outgunned, far from safety, these LRRPs stalked the enemy to his lair, staging bold prisoner snatches and tracking down hidden jungle bases. Hiding in ambush, surrounded by NVA, these teams either pulled off spectacular escape-and-evasion maneuvers in running firefights—or died trying.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap
Two cassettes, 2 hrs.
Read by Don Leslie

A book about fine leadership in combat, LRRP COMPANY COMMAND focuses on Captain George Paccerelli as he molds the men of the Air Cav's LRRP company into a successful reconnaissance unit. Jorgenson spent 7 years in the Army; three as an infantryman and four as a journalist. After surviving a number of missions as a LRRP with Hotel Company (Airborne), Jorgenson transferred to Alpha (aka Apache) Troop, where he walked point for its reaction force, the Blues. Jorgenson brings his considerable experience as a soldier and journalist to bear in this absorbing account.

About the Author
Kregg P.J. Jorgenson served in Vietnam with Company H, Rangers, and later with Apache Troop, the 1st of the 9th Cavalry. *LRRP Company Command* is his fifth book about the men who fought in Vietnam. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland and City University-Seattle. He is a law-enforcement officer in the Pacific Northwest.

On October 18, 1968, Capt. George Paccerelli was selected to take over the 1st Air Cavalry Division's long-range patrol company. He had been handpicked for the job because of his impressive military credentials and because an "experienced" captain was sorely needed in the position. George Paccerelli was experienced, and his personnel file reflected his skill and ability.

He was well read, spoke several languages, and was working on his first masters degree. He was a husband and father and, best of all--at least to the decision makers--he was a professional soldier. Paccerelli had fifteen years of military experience, ten of which had been as an enlisted man. He was Airborne, Ranger, Special Forces, and Jungle School qualified, and had already served two difficult combat tours of duty. He had earned a uniform full of awards, tabs, and medals in battles in Laos, Cambodia, and the Central Highlands of South Vietnam long before he arrived in country for his third tour of duty.

So when G-2, the division-level intelligence arm of the Cav, requested the names of officers qualified to command Company E, 52d Infantry (LRP), at Camp Evans, Lt. Col. Addison D. Davis, the battalion commander of the 2d of the 7th Cav, submitted Paccerelli's name. After all the interviews had been conducted and the selection made, Davis was the first to let Paccerelli know of the outcome.

"Congratulations!" Davis announced with a broad grin. "You're the lucky bastard!"

Until that moment, George Paccerelli had been the battalion's acting S-2, intelligence officer, and he was well suited to run the shop. No one appreciated the intelligence officer's slot more than someone who had had to rely on tactical information in combat. The thirty-two-year-old mustang (former enlisted man) officer had been temporarily filling the slot until a company-command position opened up in one of the battalion's infantry line units, which is where he really wanted to be. Paccerelli was next in line for a combat command and looking forward to it. However, division headquarters had other ideas. Echo Company (LRP) would get

priority, not that it really mattered to Paccerelli. In fact, he was genuinely pleased with the idea and saw it as a plum. The concept of small five- to six-man Lurp teams working behind the lines was one of the best ways he knew to beat the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese commanders at their own game of guerrilla warfare, and with the immense helicopter gunship support the Cav had to offer, he was looking forward to taking command of the air mobile long-range patrol company. There wasn't a veteran Special Forces soldier who didn't subscribe to the logic of Sun-tzu, the ancient Chinese warrior/philosopher, "If you cause opponents to be unaware of the place and time of battle, you will achieve victory."

In the war that preceded the U.S. effort in Indochina, the French had belatedly discovered that commando units working behind the lines could effectively deal with the Viet Minh. The Groupement des Commandos Mixtes Aeroportes, better known by their initials, GMAC, were remarkably successful, but deployed too late in the war to turn the tide of their ultimate defeat. Yet, after Dien Bien Phu had fallen and French control over the region slipped into the hands of Communist general Vo Nguyen Giap in 1954, the GMAC commandos managed to fight on effectively for several more years. The "little wars" of the guerrilla fighter were very often effective.

As the S-2, George Paccerelli had often dealt with the division's Lurp teams and was impressed with what he saw and heard during their patrol debriefings. The division Lurps, in his mind, had their act together. Everyone at division knew what they had accomplished six months earlier on Signal Hill, and even if they didn't know the specifics, they sure as hell knew the basic story. It was Custer's Last Stand with a happy ending.

Six months earlier, in Operation Delaware, the Cav had raided the enemy-held A Shau Valley. While seven of the division's nine infantry battalions had roared into the valley and up the surrounding slopes, the Lurps were rappelling onto the five-thousand-foot peak of A Loui, a dark, brooding mountain that overlooked the valley floor. The Lurps, along with volunteers from the 8th Engineers and the 13th Signal Battalion, had been tasked to establish a radio-relay station to coordinate the Cav's operations in the valley below. The radio-relay station was essential to the success of Operation Delaware, and the assault force of Lurps, engineers, and signalmen had to take and hold the mountaintop.

On the morning of 19 April 1968, the assault force departed Camp Evans for the A Shau. The flight was an anxious one for the cavalrymen. Since there was no open space big enough for the helicopters to land, the Lurps had to rappel onto the mountaintop. As the lead UH-1 flared for its short final approach, gusty crosswinds rising over the valley hit the aircraft, forcing it to veer away. The pilot struggled desperately to hold the aircraft steady, but it was a losing battle.

As the first two men hooked up to the ninety-foot rappelling rope and climbed out on the skids, the helicopter's engine faltered, then began to fail. The two Lurps on the ropes, Sergeants Bill Hand and Larry Curtis, had already begun their descent. Too far below the crippled aircraft to be hauled back aboard, Hand and Curtis tried to beat the chopper to the ground, falling the last forty feet into the trees only seconds before the dying aircraft tumbled down behind them.

Injured and dazed from the hard landing, Hand had just enough time to bring his hands over his head, tuck into a tight ball, and roll away before the Huey crashed down through the trees, its main rotor blade digging a trench into the jungle floor just inches from his head. The helicopter itself fell directly on Curtis but, miraculously, did nothing more than trap the injured Lurp beneath its skids.

The second miracle was that there was no fire from the ruptured fuel tank as the helicopter's fourteen hundred SHP Savco Lycoming engine died screaming in place. Those aboard the downed aircraft had also

survived, but not without taking a heavy beating against the airframe as it tumbled through the trees. The survivors struggled to climb out of the twisted wreckage, trying to establish some sort of perimeter and assist those too injured to help themselves. Just below the crest of A Loui, the NVA had previously mounted antiaircraft positions to deal with the threat of American helicopters so enemy soldiers were already beginning to turn their attention, and their guns, to the mountaintop above them.

Users Review

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